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A Light in the Darkness: Jawaharlal Nehru and Communalism – 1947-50

> He is fire and the sun; he is the moon and the stars, he is the air and the sea.
> He is the boy and that girl. He appears in countless different forms.
> He has no beginning, and he has no end. He is the source of all things.
> Each type of living being is distinct and different. But when we pierce the veil of difference, we see the unity of all beings - *Svetasvatara Upanishad*[1]

I refer to above quote from *Svetasvatara Upanishad* to show that Indic traditions had long acknowledged and laid importance to the unity and oneness of all beings in a world teeming with its rich hues of diversity. In his political leadership, India's first prime minster Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) had seen this vignette of truth and committed himself to keep India united from the calamities of communalism in the aftermath of the partition and mass violence which had ensued in its wake. How did Nehru strive to keep India united in its early years of Independence when the wounds of partition were still afresh with its memory of ghastly violence? What challenges did he endure when a war with Pakistan was on the horizon in the 1950s, due to violence between Hindu and Muslim communities in East Pakistan? How did he tackle communal organizations such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) during the early years after Gandhi's assassination on January 30, 1948?

In this paper, I aim to explore these questions primarily through Nehru's *Letters to his Chief Ministers*, but also through his personal letters, statements, and speeches at the time. I have chosen the early period of 1947-50 for my investigation. A tumultuous time, India was then integrating princely states such as Hyderabad, Kashmir, and Junagadh into the Indian Union, resettling millions of refugees after the partition (estimates range from 14 – 20 million refuges which affected both sides of the border) and dealing with the newly created state of Pakistan.

[1] Danielle and Olivier Follmi, *Wisdom:365 Thoughts from Indian Masters (*New York: Abrams, 2004), January 3 quote cited from *Svetasvatara Upanishads*.

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The period also saw some remarkable achievements such as the constitution of India ratified in January 1950. Following this landmark achievement, India's first parliamentary elections which were held in 1951-52 elected Congress to power based on a universal adult franchise. The Congress gained 364 out of 489 seats in the Lok Sabha (the lower house of the Parliament).[2] Through my discussion, I aim to provide a general survey of Nehru's leadership in these early years. I explore how Nehru managed the threat of communalism, which has always been (and remains to this day) one of the major menaces pushing India into a complete darkness.

The Road to Independence – 1946 Pre-Partition Violence in Bengal and Bihar

When Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim league declared a 'Direct Action Day' on August 16, 1946 in response to the latest resolution of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) which was passed in Wardha on 10 August 1946, tensions broke out in Calcutta. The talks between Jinnah and Nehru had also failed and although CWC was getting busy with working on a proposal to be submitted to the British Viceroy for the formation of the interim government, the Muslim League in protest was working on opposing this move. As Maulana Abul Kalam Azad notes,[3]

> The 16th of August was a black day in the history of India. Unprecedented mob violence plunged the great city of Calcutta into an orgy of bloodshed, murder and terror. Hundreds of lives were lost. Thousands were injured and property worth crores of rupees was destroyed. Processions were taken out by the League, which began to loot and commit acts of arson. Soon the whole city was in the grip of goondas[4] of both communities.

The 16th August incident –also known as 'The Great Calcutta Killings' –had already posed a critical situation when the interim government was in the process of establishing itself. However, by the time the interim government emerged in September of 1946, it had to deal with further escalation of violence in Noakhali in East Bengal in early October. While many Hindus were

[2] Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 232.
[3] Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1959), 159.
[4] Goonda is a Hindi word which translates as Hooligan.

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attacked in Noakhali, violence erupted in retaliation in Bihar on 25 October 1946, wiping out entire Muslim villages in the rural districts of Patna, Gaya and Monghyr. Mridula Mukherjee notes that Muslim League, who was in control in Bengal under the leadership of Shahid Suhrawardy was unable to control the situation.[5] M.K Gandhi reached Noakhali in November of 1946 and stayed there till March 1947, and although Gandhi's presence helped somewhat, it was not able to create a sense of peace and security among the communities and the atmosphere of fear and panic continued.

In contrast, as Mukherjee notes, the interim Government under Nehru's leadership in Bihar took a firm and effective action and brought the situation under control in less than two weeks.[6] Nehru was already touring Calcutta at the time in connection with Noakhali incident. He rushed to Bihar with an intention to stay until the situation improved. Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, Acharya Kripalani, Jayaprakash Narayan and many other Congress leaders, accompanied Nehru. Mukherjee notes Nehru's determination and steadfastness in controlling the situation:[7]

> In fact, it is in Bihar that we get the first glimpse of the unambiguous, determined, and even emotional quality of Nehru's secularism. He went from place to place addressing the people. His determination and desperation were simultaneously in evidence. One by one, he brandished all the weapons in his armoury, the coercive power of the state, the prestige and ideals of the freedom struggle, the prestige and reverence for Gandhiji, his own personal prestige and much else. 'I will stand in the way of Hindu–Muslim riots. Members of both the communities will have to tread over my dead body before they can strike at each other.'[8]

Maulana Azad also remarks in his book, *India Wins Freedom* regarding the strong action taken by the interim Government under Nehru's leadership concerning the incidents in Bihar and "firmness and strength with which Jawaharlal sought to check these attacks on life and

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[5] Mridula Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's finest hour? The struggle for a secular India," *Studies in People's History*, 1, 2 (2014): 200.
[6] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 200.
[7] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 201.
[8] For this statement, consult Nehru's speech at Biharsharif, 4 Nov 1946. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (hereafter *SWJN*), Series 2, Vol. 1, 1984, p. 57.

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property."[9] Nehru was resolute in using all the power and might of the government to control the lawlessness and punish the perpetrators. However, in his public meetings while touring the affected areas, Nehru continued to condemn communalism as he said:[10]

> Unless the people of Bihar make active and sincere efforts even now to quench the fire of communalism and violence it would lead to a huge conflagration famed by ill will, hatred and distrust and would burn to ashes every one of them in the end along with all that had been achieved by the sacrifices of so many of their countrymen.

Although Nehru tried to control the situation, he felt completely disturbed and distressed with these developments knowing that a mass number of Muslims were killed in retaliation for Noakhali incident. Such was his distress that when he heard that army has taken control and fired at a mob where 400 were killed, he somewhat felt relieved hoping that the situation will get better. On November 11, 1946, in a letter to Padmaja Naidu, Nehru wrote:[11]

> I have had horror enough during the past two days. Something incredible had happened here, or something that I would have refused to believe in, a few days ago. Hindu peasant mobs have behaved in a manner that is the extreme of brutality and inhumanity. How many have been done to death by them I do not yet know, but it must be a vast number.

In the same letter, he further notes concerning the perpetrators:[12]

> For a few days they had it their own way, with few checks or hindrances. And so when the news came that they have been stopped at last in one place and that 400 of them had died, I felt that the balance had been very slightly righted.

It was Nehru's tireless speeches committing his stance to condemning communalism, his firmness with enforcement of law and order and his severe attitude towards the perpetrators were the reasons that brought the situation in Bihar under control. In dealing with the situation in Bihar, Nehru deployed Gandhian tactics, where he was asking the peasants in public meetings to take pledges to cease further violence. Nehru had also enrolled Congress workers to commit to the cause of stopping violence in rural

[9] Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 213.
[10] Speech at Public Meeting at Monghyr, 5 Nov 1946. *SWJN*, 61.
[11] *SWJN*, 65.
[12] *SWJN*, 65.

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areas and was requesting students to give up their studies and work in the rural areas of Bihar to bring sanity back to people.

Similarly, when violence erupted just a few months before independence in Punjab, Nehru's approach was stern and merciless towards the perpetrators of communal violence as he requested the British Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten to control the situation with martial law and give orders to shoot at sight. [13]

Freedom leads to Violence - September 1947 communal violence in Delhi

The violence in the Punjab, which had taken place months before the partition created millions of refugees. Hindus and Sikhs from Punjab migrated to Delhi bringing with them awful stories of murder and killings and demanded justice and punishment for their perpetrators. This created a backlash reaction in Delhi towards its Muslim residents. Besides the resettlement of refuges who were trickling down from West Punjab, the new government had to deal with the situation in the capital where its Muslim residents were no longer safe. Maulana Azad recounts the turmoil of Delhi in his book:[14]

> During these days of arson, murder and rioting, I toured different parts of Delhi in the company of army officers. I found the Muslims completely demoralized and suffering from a sense of utter helplessness. Many asked for shelter in my house. Rich and well-known families of the city came to me completely destitute and with no earthly possessions left except the clothes they were wearing. Some did not dare to come by daylight and were brought under military protection at midnight or in the early hours of the morning. My house was soon full and I put up tents in my compound. Men and women of all kinds and conditions- rich and poor, young and old huddled together in sheer fear of death.

To handle the situation in Delhi, the Indian government decided to deploy the army from the South as the partition and its unleashing of communal hatred had not affected that region, and hence army from the South could be trusted to act impartially. Further, the government evacuated Muslims from their homes, bringing them together in protected camps. The historic sites of Delhi such as the Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb were used for this purpose.

[13] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 202.
[14] Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 211.

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Based on Mountbatten's suggestion, the Government of India treated this situation as it was a war, and set up Councils which worked around the clock. Hence an Emergency Board was set up which included some members of the Cabinet and some high civil and military officers, and the Board which was presided over by Mountbatten worked around the clock until the peace was restored. Azad notes Nehru's efficiency in handling the situation:[15]

> One of the first signs of a true administrator is that he can rise above personal likes and dislikes and guarantee security of life and property to all. During the terrible days of 1946 and 1947, Jawaharlal displayed in a signal manner these qualities of a true administrator. From the first day he joined Government, he realized that the State must not discriminate between citizens and that it must treat Hindus and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, Parsees and Buddhists equally. Whoever was an Indian citizen had equal claim in the eye of the law.

Delhi's situation had plunged India into a further crisis at this time. Apart from the resettlement of refugees, the government had to be concerned with burying the dead and providing continual protection and safety to its Muslim citizens. Even Mountbatten expressed his utter shock towards the situation as he wrote to his daughter Patricia remarking that "he had never been through anything like it,"[16] and "The War, the Viceroyalty were jokes, for we have been dealing with life and death in our own city."[17] In his handling of the situation, Nehru had ignored his own personal safety as he went about in public to meet the people who were the victim of the atrocities and to calm the madness. A significant thing to note here is that even in these turbulent times, Nehru did not hesitate to spell out the dangers of communalism and what it meant for free India. He noted his conception of India in his top secret note for the cabinet dated 12 Sep 1947. Here, he asks what kind of India is being envisioned: "Is it going to be, as it has been in a large measure, a kind of composite state where there is complete cultural freedom for various groups… or do we wish to make it, as certain elements appear to desire, definitely a Hindu or a non-Muslim state?"[18]

[15] Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 212-13.
[16] Brown, *Nehru*, 176.
[17] Brown, *Nehru,* 176.
[18] Brown, *Nehru,* 176.

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The events of Delhi had shaken Nehru's unswerving faith in his people and his idea of India. In a letter dated 17 Sep 1947 to Rajendra Prasad, Nehru expressed his total disgust for the cruelty and brutality in the events of Delhi. In this letter, we see a sign of Nehru's diminishing faith in the country's newly acquired freedom as it became enmeshed in the violence of communalism and the bitterness of partition. "I have no stomach for this leadership. Unless we keep to some standards, freedom has little meaning, and certainly India will not become the great nation we have dreamt of for so long."[19] It was not just Nehru, but Gandhi had also felt the deep anguish and pain of the killings, which had taken place in the backdrop of independence and caused millions to suffer. Gandhi had decided to fast until the situation became normal and the Muslim citizens of Delhi could feel safe and secure. Both Nehru and Gandhi were committed to provide equal rights to minorities. Hence, conditions were proposed in which Gandhi would break his fast which included that the residents of Delhi will ensure that they protect their Muslim citizens and prevent any attacks on Muslim citizens including attacks which were taking place on moving trains. A gathering of 50,000 men and women pledged to take this as their responsibility in early January of 1948. Eventually, Gandhi broke his fast and commenced his prayer meetings. Such were the conditions at the time that Arthur Moore, former Editor of the Statesman had also begun his fast in the Imperial Hotel in Delhi. As he told Maulana Azad, "Death was preferable to the terrible tragedy which had overtaken India."[20]

Certain Hindu elements were unhappy with Gandhi's peaceful resolution and assurances concerning safety of the Muslims. An assassination attempt on Gandhi first took place through a bomb explosion when Gandhi was going to his prayer meeting which was held at the Birla

[19] Brown, *Nehru,* 176.
[20] Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, 221.

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House where Gandhi was also staying. Hence, came another chapter in India's history barely five months after the independence, when Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948.

Post-Independence Onwards – Gandhi's Death brings new dilemma to the future of India

Gandhi was shot by Nathuram Godse just a little after 5:00 pm on January 30, 1948. Gandhi was already frail as he had been fasting earlier that month as a protest to killings and communal riots in Delhi. Godse had fired three bullets into Gandhi's chest 'using a primitive pistol'[21] and hence Gandhi was dead within minutes. Godse was linked with the communal organizations Hindu Mahasabha and the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh. (RSS) It is significant to note that the Hindu Mahasabha did not celebrate the Independence Day on Aug 14, 1947. As Mukherjee notes,[22]

> It refused to accept the national flag, upholding the *bhagwajhanda* as the only flag worthy of veneration. The Congress, as the ruling party, was sought to be pressurised into declaring the state a Hindu *rashtra.* The very raising of such a demand was an indicator of the strength of Hindu communal forces by this time.

When Mountbatten and his Press Attaché Alan Campbell-Johnson arrived at the scene at the Birla House after the news of Gandhi's assassination had spread, they found an 'inexpressibly sad and careworn Nehru.'[23] With already brewing turmoil, Gandhi's assassination had brought India further to a standstill. However, Nehru stood firm and committed himself to spread the light of peace and harmony, which was shone by Gandhi through his work on communal harmony. At his talk, broadcasted from Delhi on the evening of January 30, 1948, Nehru said:[24]

> The light has gone out. I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts. For that light represented something more than immediate present, it represented the living, the eternal truths, reminding us of the right part, drawing us from error, taking this ancient country to freedom.

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[21] Patrick French, *Liberty or Death. India's Journey to Independence and Division* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 360.
[22] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 209.
[23] French, *Liberty or Death*, 360.
[24] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Independence And After; A Collection of Speeches 1946-1949* (New York: John Day Company, 1950), 17.

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In the same speech, he summoned his country to face the poison of communalism and to root out this poison while facing all the dangers involved in it but root out this poison 'not madly or badly, but rather in the way that our beloved teacher taught us to face them.'[25]

In his statement before the Constituent Assembly on February 2 1948, Nehru warned of the atmosphere of hatred and violence, which had prevailed in the country, and committing to act on the ideals of Gandhi, he told his government:[26]

> So far as this Government is concerned, I trust they will spare no means , spare no effort to tackle it, because if we do not do that, if we in our weakness or for any other reason that we may consider adequate, do not take effective means to stop this violence, to stop, this spreading of hatred by word of mouth or writing or act, then indeed we are not worthy of being in this government.

On February 12 1948, about a crowd of million people had gathered at the banks of Jumna River (also known as Yumna River) to watch the immersion of Gandhi's ashes into the holy waters of Ganges where the confluence of sacred rivers Ganges and Jumna occurs in Allahabad. Addressing a crowd of million people, Nehru stressed the importance of fighting the poison of hatred and enmity, not keeping ill will or enmity against any person as it was the seed of hatred which needed to be eradicated. He noted that, 'The path of violence is perilous and freedom seldom exists for long where there is violence'[27] and reminded his people to 'tread the path of truth and Dharma.'[28]

Nehru tirelessly worked to spread his message and dedicated himself to eradicate communalism and violence even though there were forces (even within the Congress Party) which were working against him. His biographer Judith Brown explores how Nehru became distressed by seeing a very strong self-identification of Hindu identity, which had become stronger after the partition, and as Nehru expressed in his correspondence to Rajendra Prasad, this form of narrowest communalism was an exact replica of

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[25] Nehru, *Independence And After; A Collection of Speeches 1946-1949* (New York: John Day Company, 1950), 17.
[26] Nehru, Independence, 24-25.
[27] Nehru, Independence, 26.
[28] Nehru, Independence, 27.

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the narrow Muslim communalism.[29] In the same correspondence, Nehru expressed concerns regarding the development of narrow sectarian outlook and how it will do grave injury to the ideals Indian and Hindu culture stand for. He wrote further: 'We are facing a crisis of the spirit in India today...'[30]

The communal forces, which were working in the background of India's newly gained independence had to take a back seat after Gandhi's assassination. When the word got around that the organizations such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS were involved in Gandhi's assassination, people held violent demonstrations against these organizations all over India. Both the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha members and their offices were attacked. Moreover, a resolution passed by the Government on February 2, 1948 declared that, "No quarter would be given to any organization encouraging violence and communal hatred," and urged the people to assist the government in fighting such forces, which had put an end to the "most precious treasure that India possessed."[31] Hence, the state banned organizations such as the RSS on 4 February 1948, as their members were allegedly involved in the acts of communal violence and terrorism. On 19 December 1948, at the Jaipur session of the Congress, a resolution drafted by Nehru called for an 'an end to the spirit of communalism' and further, it provided a firm commitment 'not to promote communalism' or 'the misuse of religion as a political weapon.'[32] Nehru could breathe for a while, or could he?

The Crisis in 1950 and the Nehru-Liaquat Pact

The ban on the RSS did not last long, ending in July 1949. RSS had given written assurances that their activities will be limited to culture, and they will not be involved in politics. Nehru was ambivalent regarding lifting the ban, but he was also committed to democracy and civil liberties. Consequently, the

[29] Brown, *Nehru,* 174-75.
[30] Brown, *Nehru,* 175.
[31] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 1, 1947-1949, ed.* G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 56.
[32] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 213.

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ban was lifted although Nehru continually warned his Chief Ministers to be very vigilant of the activities of any such organizations. The vigour and resolute commitment of Nehru to resolve communal issues through the most turbulent times of 1947-50 began to wane in early 1950. At this time, communal trouble in East Bengal began to emerge as Muslims attacked Hindus in large numbers. This created an outpouring of refugees in West Bengal. However, very soon, retaliation against Muslims commenced in West Bengal and this created a two-way flood of refugees. Nehru discussed the situation with his Minsters in his letter of 16 February 1950. He noted that the situation in Dacca may be on a considerable scale, even larger than August 1947. The situation in Calcutta also grew to a considerable scale.[33] As Nehru laid out government interventions in order to control the situation, it was clear from this letter that he was getting weary of trying to handle communal troubles with India's short (just close to three years in early1950) tryst with the freedom. Nehru expressed his feelings in the same letter as he wrote: "We appear to live somewhere near the top of a volcano and any spark tends to waken it into eruption. We succeed more or less in bottling it up again. But the volcano remains and we hear the rumblings of it."[34] His utter helplessness is visible as he asks his Ministers, "How are we to get out of it?"[35] He referred to the vicious circle, created by retaliation.

On April 8, 1950, after seven days of continuous discussions with the Prime minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, Nehru secured a treaty known as 'Delhi Pact' or 'Nehru-Liaquat Pact'. Indian Home Minister, Sardar Patel, the right hand in the Nehru government himself differed with Nehru's secular ethos, strongly backed Nehru in securing the Pact, which bounded both India and Pakistan to safeguard interests of their minority populations. The Pact also averted a crisis, which could have led to a war with Pakistan and would have led to large population exchanges on both sides of the border as was proposed

[33] Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52, ed.* G. Parthasarathi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23.
[34] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 24.
[35] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 24.

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by some people as a viable option. In his statement of 23 February 1950, Nehru had committed himself to find a solution to the Bengal crisis by seeking cooperation of his counterpart in Pakistan. Parallel with this crisis, Nehru continually warned his ministers of the Hindu Mahasabha and the R.S.S, which were then playing a part in further exacerbating the situation by spreading rumours.[36] Nehru himself visited Calcutta twice to understand the situation. Once, the agreement was signed with Liaquat Ali Khan, certain cabinet ministers in Nehru government, such as S.P Mookerjee, also the leader of Hindu Mahasabha resigned noting India's attitude towards Pakistan as 'weak, halting and inconsistent.'[37] Nehru however defended the agreement as he wrote to his Ministers in his letter of 15 April 1950:

> We have been accused of appeasement of Pakistan. The word has a bad odour and a bad history. I do not myself see where appeasement comes in, either on the side of the Government or the people. If anything that is not war is appeasement, then perhaps we have appeased. It would be equally true to say that Pakistan has tried to appease us. If an attempt to prevent a reversion to barbarism is appeasement, then perhaps the charge is true. [38]

Although the implementation of agreement and its efforts were slow, Nehru noted in his letter of early May that agreement is certainly changing the atmosphere of both countries and providing a glimmer of hope for the future while bringing immediate relief to millions.[39]

Epilogue

A 1992 documentary, *Ram ke Naam* (In the Name of God) by filmmaker Anand Patwardhan depicts what would become the most triumphal victory for Hindu nationalists and organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (the VHP) and the RSS. An agitation led by the Bhartiya Janata Party (the BJP) in October 1990 along with the VHP and other Hindu nationalist organizations lead to a demolition of a 16th century mosque in Ayodhya city known as Babri Masjid.[40] The mosque was allegedly built by one of the Mughal generals, on a birthplace of Ram. Prince Ram, who is the hero of the Indian epic,

[36] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 36.
[37] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 68.
[38] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 75.
[39] Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers 1947-1964, Volume 2, 1950-52,* 81.
[40] The agitation which started in 1990 to claim the mosque as the birth spot of Rama led to its demolition on 6 December, 1992.

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Ramayana is considered an incarnate of the Hindu God Vishnu, is venerated by the Hindus and is believed to be born in the city of Ayodhya. A 22-23 December 1949 incident where local *mahants* (priests) dropped a few idols, which included Ram and other Hindu deities in the mosque's compound, created a new controversy on already disputed issue and hence the mosque was shutdown. They claimed that the images have appeared miraculously at the alleged birthplace of Ram.

The district magistrate K.K Nayyar at the time refused to intervene on the issue and the idols were not removed. Instead, the mosque was locked up. Nehru was aware of the issue, and he personally wrote to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh at the time, Govind Ballabh Pant and requested to be kept fully informed on the issue. Sardar Patel supported Nehru and requested Pant to take a strong action. Although the district magistrate K.K Nayyar was transferred, no further action was taken citing fear of a large scale riot.[41] Mukherjee notes that the intense mobilization for the cause of claiming the Babri mosque as the birthplace of Ram occurred in the backdrop of intense bitterness and frustration of the partition.[42] Before the 1949 incident in Ayodhya, Muslims were using the old mosque to pray and offer *Namaz*, while Hindus were using the courtyard area for Ram worship. This issue resurfacing in 1990 had grabbed the hand of politics and the marriage of Hindu nationalist organizations like the RSS and the VHP and of the BJP, enacted a momentum towards a most dangerous kind of communalism, which India is witnessing to this day.[43] The events of 1990 led to the demolition of the mosque on 6 December 1992. This led to riots in various parts of India and as Ramchandra Guha notes "an orgy of violence that lasted two months and claimed more than two thousand lives."[44]

[41] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 214.
[42] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 213.
[43] India has witnessed other communal events on a small and large scale post-partition. The 1984 Sikh Pogrom in Delhi after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Islamic Radical movement in Kashmir which lead to the exodus of Kashmiri Hindus in 1990s and the Gujrat Pogrom of 2002 which claimed a large number of Muslim lives.
[44] Ramachandra Guha, *India after Gandhi. The History of the World's Largest Democracy* (Revised and Updated Edition, New York: HarperCollins, 2019), 624.

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However, what is interesting with the Hindu nationalist movement[45] stemming from Ayodhya event is that it has steadily developed strong roots and its marriage into politics is now fully secure with the currently elected BJP government and with virtually no opposition. *Ram Ke Naam* documents different viewpoints as the agitation to demolish mosque on the alleged birthplace of Ram develops. Some volunteers participating in the movement are frustrated that the Muslims had ruled Hindus, some are frustrated that in the Indian history of Muslim rule, the temples were destroyed, and they were now willing to do whatever to protect their religion and claim Babri Masjid as the birthplace of Ram. While others gathered and echoed the thoughts of Nehru and Gandhi, asking the zealot Hindus to make temple anywhere in Ayodhya but not to demand the destruction of already standing 16th century mosque and respect India's secular ethos. One of the powerful characters in the documentary is Pujari Lal Das. Pujari Lal Das was the government appointed priest at the controversial site where Hindus were allowed to worship. He frequently appears in the film, vehemently opposing the movement to demolish the mosque, calling it politically motivated and appears to be driven primarily for gaining Hindu votes. He notes that the movement ignores how many people will die as the movement had already stirred up riots in many places in India. Laldas further remarks in his interview that many Muslim rulers had donated land for building Hindu temples in Ayodhya. However, current Indian politics is destroying all this and laying waste to the achievements of the past. Like Gandhi, Pujari Lal Das formed an obstacle to the mass mobilization of Hindu communalism. There were few attempts at his life. Finally, he was shot

[45] For recent reportage on rise of Hindutva politics see: Inamdar, Vedika & George, Pooja. "Slow Boil; Patterns in Everyday Acts of Public Violence in Modi's India." The Caravan. May 31, 2022. Accessed on June 30, 2022. https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/public-violence-modi-india and Sakunia, Samriddhi. "Hindu Rashtra OST; The Hindutva Pop Singers Fuelling the Politics of Hate." The Caravan. June 30, 2022. Accessed on July 2, 2022. https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/hindutva-pop-hate. Following is an excellent source discussing the rise of Hindu nationalism: Chatterji, Angana P., Hansen, Thomas Blom, and Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Majoritarian State: how Hindu nationalism is changing India*. London: Hurst & Company, 2020.

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dead in November 1993.[46] At the time of his death, the provincial government of Uttar Pradesh had removed him from his post as the appointed priest.

I discussed the Ayodhya incident in some length to demonstrate the futility of law and order in governing organizations like the VHP. In tandem, I also wanted to draw attention to early Nehru years and his complete steadfastness and resolute commitment in trying to curb communalism. Whether it was through speeches, resolutions, or a firm personal commitment to resolve communalism as expressed through his letters, Nehru's leadership strove to find different ways to fight this rising tide. In October 1990, even law and order could not control thousands of individuals marching towards Ayodhya in order to take over the disputed mosque. Its final demolition occurred in a hefty police presence on December 6, 1992. Today, the alliance of religion and politics is so strong in India that it would be very difficult to say that the government is acting on an impartial manner towards its citizens. I see this as an utter tragedy.

In expressing his utter anguish and pain for Delhi violence in September 1947, Nehru had warned:[47]

> The future appears to be dark not so much because 50,000 or 100,000 people have been murdered, but because of the mentality that has accompanied this and that perhaps might continue... if we surrender to this mentality then we are doomed as a nation.

[46] Valay Singh, "Ayodhya's Forgotten Mahant and His Message of Peace," The Wire, November 13, 2019, Accessed on July 3, 2022, https://thewire.in/communalism/ayodhya-ram-mandir-baba-lal-das
[47] Mukherjee, "Jawaharlal Nehru's," 206.

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